

And tales, bothe of pees and of debaat.
I were right now of tales desolaat,
Nere that a marchant, goon is many a yeere,
Me taughte a tale, which that ye shal heere.

Heere bigynneth the Man of Lawe his Tale.
Pars prima.



LN Surrye whilom dwelte a com-
paignye
Of chapmen riche, and therto
sadde and trewe,
That wydewhere senten hir
spicerye,
Clothes of gold, and satyns
riche of hewe.
Hir chaffare was so thrifty and
so newe,
That every wight hath deyntee
to chaffare
With hem, and eek to sellen
hem hire ware.

Now fil it that the maistres of
that sort
Han shapen hem to Rome for
to wende;

Were it for chapmanhode, or
for disport,
Noon oother message wolde they thider sende,
But comen hemself to Rome, this is the ende;
And in swich place, as thoughte hem advantage
for hire entente, they take hir herbergage.

Sojourned han these marchants in that toun
A certain tyme, as fil to hire plesance;
And so bifel that the excellent renoun
Of the Emperours doghter, dame Custance,
Reported was, with every circumstance,
Unto these Surryen marchants in swich wyse,
fro day to day, as I shal yow devyse.

This was the commune voys of every man:
Oure Emperour of Rome, God hym see!
A doghter hath that syn the world bigan,
To rekene as wel hir goodness as beautee,
Nas nevere swich another as is shee.
I prey to God, in honour hire sustene,
And wolde she were of al Europe the queene!

In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,
Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
To alle hire werkis vertu is hir gyde;
Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye;
She is mirour of alle curteisye;
Hir herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse,
Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse.

And al this voys was sooth, as God is trewe;
But now to purpos lat us turne agayn;
This marchants han doon fraught hir shippes
newe,
And, whan they han this blisful mayden sayn,
hoom to Surrye been they went ful fayn,

And doon hir nedes as they han doon yore,
And lyven in wele; I kan sey yow na moore.

Now fil it, that these marchants stode in grace
Of hym that was the sowdan of Surrye;
for whan they cam from any strange place
He wolde, of his benigne curteisye,
Make hem good chiere, and bisily espye
Tidynge of sondry regnes, for to leere
The wondres that they myghte seen or heere.

Amonges othere thynges, specially,
This marchants han hym toold of dame Custance,
So greet noblesse in earnest, curiously,
That this sowdan hath caught so greet plesance
To han hir figure in his remembrance,
That al his lust, and al his busy cure,
Was for to love hire while his lyf may dure.

Paraventure in this large book,
Which that men clepe the hevene, ywriten was
With sterres, whan that he his birthe took,
That he for love sholde han his deeth, alas!
for in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
Is writen, God woot, whoso koude it rede,
The deeth of every man, withouten drede.

In sterres, many a wynter ther biforn,
Was writen the deeth of Ector, Achilles,
Of Pompei, Julius, er they were born;
The strif of Chebes; and of Ercules,
Of Sampson, Turnus; and of Socrates
The deeth; but mennes wittes ben so dulle,
That no wight kan wel rede it atte fulle.

THIS sowdan for his privee conseil sente,
And, shortly of this matiere for to pace,
He hath to hem declared his entente,
And seyde hem, certain, But he myghte have grace
To han Custance withinne a litel space,
He nas but deed; and charged hem in hie
To shapen for his lyf som remedye.

Diverse men diverse thynges seyden,
They argumenten, casten up and down;
Many a subtil resoun forth they leyden;
They speken of magyk and abusoun;
But finally, as in conclusioun,
They kan nat seen in that noon advantage,
Ne in noon oother wey, save mariage.

Thanne sawe they therinne swich difficultee,
By wey of reson, for to speke al playn,
Bycause that ther was swich diversitee
Bitwene hir bothe lawes, that they sayn,
They trowe That no cristene prince wolde fayn
Wedden his child under oure lawes sweete,
That us were taught by Mahoun, oure prophete.

And he answerde, Rather than I lese
Custance, I wol be cristned, doutelees;
I moot been hires, I may noon oother chese.
I prey yow hoold youre arguments in pees;
Saveth my lyf, and beth noght recchelees

To geten hire that hath my lyf in cure;
for in this wo I may nat longe endure.

What nedeth gretter dilatacioun?
I seye, by tretys and embassadrie,
And by the popes mediacioun,
And al the chirche, and al the chivalrie,
That in destruccioun of Maumetrie,
And in encrees of Cristes lawe deere,
They been acorded, so as ye shal heere,

Now that the sowdan and his baronage
And alle his liges, sholde yristned be,
And he shal han Custance in mariage,
And certein gold, I noot what quantitee,
And heerto founden sufficient suretee;
This same accord was sworn on eyther syde;
Now, faire Custance, almyghty God thee gyde!

Now wolde som men waiten, as I gesse,
That I sholde tellen al the purveiance
That thempour, of his grete noblesse,
hath shapen for his doghter, dame Custance.
Wel may men knowen that so greet ordinance
May no man tellen in a litel clause,
As was arrayed for so heigh a cause.

Bisshopes been shapen with hire for to wende,
Lordes, ladies, knyghtes of renoun,
And oother folk ynogh, this is the ende;
And notified is thurghout the toun
That every wight, with greet devocioun,
Sholde preyen Crist, that he this mariage
Receyve in gree, and spede this viage.

THE day is comen of hir departyng,
I seye, the woful day fatal is come,
That ther may be no lenger taryng,
But forthward they hem dresen, alle and some.
Custance, that was with sorwe al overcome,
ful pale arist, and dreseth hire to wende;
for wel she seeth ther is noon oother ende.

Alas! what wonder is it thogh she wepte,
That shal be sent to strange nacioun,
fro freendes that so tendrely hire kepte,
And to be bounden under subjeccioun
Of oon, she knoweth nat his condicioun.
Housbondes been alle goode, and han ben yore;
That knowen wyves, I dar say yow na moore.

Fader, she seyde, thy wretched child, Custance,
Thy yonge doghter, fostred up so softe,
And ye, my mooder, my soverayn plesance,
Over alle thyng, outtaken Crist on lofte,
Custance, youre child, hire recomandeth ofte
Unto your grace; for I shal to Surrye,
Ne shal I nevere seen yow moore with eye.

Alas! unto the barbre nacioun
I moste goon, syn that it is youre wille;
But Crist, that starf for our savacioun,
So yeve me grace his heestes to fulfille;
I, wrecche womman, no fors thogh I spille!

Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,
And to been under mannes governance.

I trowe at Troye, whan Pirrus brak the wal,
Or Ilion brende, at Chebes the citee,
Nat Rome, for the harm thurgh Hanybal,
That Romayns bath venquysshed tymes thre,
Nas herd swich tendre wepyng for pitee,
As in the chambre was for hire departyng;
But forth she moot, wherso she wepe or synge.

O firste moevyng, cruel firmament,
With thy diurnal sweigh that crowdest ay,
And hurlest al from Est til Occident,
That naturelly wolde holde another way;
Thy crowdyng set the hevene in swich array
At the bigynnyng of this fiers viage,
That cruel Mars hath slayn this mariage.

Infortunat ascendent tortuous,
Of which the lord is helpless falle, alas,
Out of his angle into the derkeste hous.
O Mars, O Atazir, as in this cas!
O fieble Moone, unhappy been thy paas!
Thou knytest thee ther thou art nat receyved,
Ther thou were weel, fro thennes artow weyved.

Imprudent emperour of Rome, alas!
Was ther no philosophre in al thy toun?
Is no tyme bet than oother in swich cas?
Of viage is ther noon eleccioun,
Namely to folk of heigh condicioun,
Noght whan a roote is of a burthe yknowe?
Alas! we been to lewed or to slowe!

Ship is come this woful faire mayde,
Solempnely, with every circumstance.
Now Jhesu Crist be with yow alle, she sayde.
Ther nys namoore but, farewell, faire Custance!
She peyneth hire to make good contenance;
And forth I lete hire saille in this manere,
And turne I wole agayn to my matere.

The mooder of the sowdan, wel of vices,
Espied hath hir sones pleyn entente,
How he wol lete his olde sacrifices;
And right anon she for hir conseil sente;
And they been come to knowe what she mente.
And whan assembled was this folk in feere,
She sette hire down and seyde as ye shal heere.

Lordes, she seyde, ye knowen everichon,
How that my sone in point is for to lete
The hooly lawes of oure Alkaron,
Yeven by Goddes message Makomete;
But oon avow to grete God I hete,
The lyf shal rather out of my body sterte,
Than Makometes lawe out of myn herte!

What sholde us tyden of this newe lawe,
But thraldom to our bodies and penance?
And afterward in helle to be drawe,
for we reneyed Mahoun oure creance?
But, lordes, wol ye maken assurance